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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 001273

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: GOI COMMITTED TO KEEPING HUMANITARIAN GOODS FLOWING

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones, reasons 1. 4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: One week after the reopening of Karni, imports into Gaza at the commercial terminal average more than 200 truckloads per day. The overwhelming majority of cargo is of humanitarian supplies. MOD advisor Brigadier General (res.) Baruch Spiegel stressed to Econ Chief that the GOI is committed to keeping humanitarian goods flowing into Gaza and to keeping Karni open and that following some initial problems, traffic at Kerem Shalom will be increasing soon. GOI officials are awaiting a decision by the MOD on increasing exports at Karni, which could come as early as April 3. Spiegel said that ongoing terrorist threats are preventing Karni from operating at full capacity and that smuggling at Rafah remains a significant problem. End summary.

12. (SBU) More than a week after Karni was reopened following the second long closure of the year, traffic at the commercial terminal remains focused primarily on humanitarian imports into Gaza. The number of trucks entering Gaza has remained steady, ranging for the most part between 180 and 220 cargo loads per day. On March 23, however, a total of 300 truckloads were able to cross into Gaza. Clearly a lower priority, exports into Israel (chiefly textiles, agricultural products, and furniture), did not start again until March 26 and averaged between 25 to 35 trucks per day.

FOCUS - HUMANITARIAN IMPORTS

13. (S) Brigadier General Baruch Spiegel (ret.) told Econ Chief on March 29 that cargo traffic through the Karni crossing had reached over 200 truckloads per day as of March 26 and truckloads entering Gaza through Kerem Shalom had reached 20 to 25 per day. Spiegel reiterated the GOI's commitment to keep humanitarian goods flowing to Gaza and to keep Karni open. He noted, however, that Karni is still operating at a diminished capacity due to what he said are significant terrorist threats. The sections of Karni that are in operation are isolated and guarded by military units. Also, a helicopter is on standby near the terminal in case of a terrorist attack. He said that traffic through Kerem Shalom was improving after some initial problems and will be increasing soon. Spiegel criticized the Palestinians for not resuming talks sponsored by the U.S. Security Coordinator and said that no security improvements have been made on the Palestinian side of the Karni crossing.

14. (C) Karni Terminal Manager Yoni Dotan told econoff on March 30 that the crossing is working on its normal schedule of 8:00 AM - 5:30 PM Sunday-Thursday and from 8:00am)2:00pm on Fridays. He said precedence is being given to humanitarian supplies to Gaza, consisting primarily of wheat flour, cooking oil, and other staples. Only one or two bays are open to exports. Empty containers are being sent back, which should make it easier for World Food Program and other donors to &recycle them8 and ship their supplies to Gaza, he said. One OCHA representative said that his organization is pleased with the level of imports currently entering at Karni, which he estimated are roughly consistent with pre-closure levels. Over 1,650 truckloads of food and commercial supplies crossed into Gaza at Karni since it reopened on March 20.

15. (C) Dotan said that he continues to have good cooperation with his Palestinian counterparts, who are the same people that he has always dealt with on the PA side. He emphasized that he has seen no change yet in operations or approach by those PA officials. MOD Lt. Col. Oded Herman confirmed to econoff that the relationship with working-level technical contacts on Karni remains good.

DECISION ON EXPORTS PENDING

16. (C) Dotan admitted that exports are extremely low, but said that he is awaiting a decision by the Minister of Defense to raise the volume. Lt. Col. Herman said that there could be a decision on increasing exports by April 3 or 4. The OCHA representative said exports in mid-February were averaging 80 truckloads per day.

RAFAH ISSUES

17. (S) Regarding the situation at the Rafah terminal, Spiegel said that the appearance of widespread smuggling through the crossing point is worrying. He pointed to intelligence reports that Palestinians are bringing a wide variety of goods such as cigarettes and cosmetics through the terminal in excess of customs regulations. The excess goods are being confiscated by Palestinian customs and placed in a warehouse, but these same goods disappear from the warehouse at night. Spiegel claimed that the EU-BAM knows about the problem but is powerless to prevent it. Part of the problem, according to Spiegel, is that Palestinian customs officials were being threatened by the smugglers when they return to their homes.

KARNI AND KEREM SHALOM STATISTICS

18. (U) The following are number of truckloads of imports (into Gaza) and exports (into Israel) at Karni crossing and imports into Gaza at Kerem Shalom March 20 - 30, according to GOI and OCHA sources. Kerem shalom did not open until March 23.

Date	Karni Imports/Karni Exports	Kerem Shalom
March 30	150/25	14
March 29	165/20	12
March 28	closed	closed
March 27	145/15	12
March 26	220/24.5	12
March 24	165/0	5
March 23	300/0	2
March 22	221/0	not open
March 21	187/0	not open
March 20	15/0	not open

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JONES